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## **The Italian diaspora and the impossibility of home in Swiss cinema**

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## THE ITALIAN DIASPORA AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF HOME IN SWISS CINEMA

### *Abstract*

The concept of “home” is a crucial *leitmotiv* in the history of Swiss cinema. More specifically, *Heimat* – a concept that intersects with that of “home” without overlapping with it – was an important issue in Swiss cinema since the silent film era, and became central during the 1940s and 1950s: the golden age of the Swiss *Heimatfilm*. In these films, patriotic cultural values are projected onto idyllic natural landscapes, which become the materialization of the concept of *Heimat* itself. New Swiss Cinema marked the beginning of a modern, critical, urban national cinematography in the 1960s. Since this point, the concept of *Heimat*, instead of being dismissed, has been criticized.

In my article, I will argue that this critique can be perceived particularly in Swiss films related to the Italian diaspora. In many of these films the idyllic representation of *Heimat* is deconstructed through the representation of a claustrophobic, precarious or even uncanny domestic sphere. For many migrants in these films, to be at “home” simply becomes a dream.

Focusing on the analysis of a representative corpus of films, my article intends to bring to light the complex relationships between home, *Heimat* and diaspora and, in doing so, to contribute to the debate which flourished in the social sciences and in media studies around these concepts and their representations.

### *Keywords*

Swiss cinema; Italian diaspora; heimat; home; accented cinema.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

*Home* is a crucial concept in the history of Swiss cinema and, in particular, in the Swiss *Heimatfilm*<sup>1</sup>. The *Heimatfilm* is a popular genre in the cinema of the German part of Switzerland, but also in German and Austrian cinema. It is a kind of cinema that has circled obsessively around the issues of home and away, tradition and change, and belonging and difference which are inscribed in the German term *Heimat*<sup>2</sup>. It became really popular in Switzerland during the 1940s and the 1950s.

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<sup>1</sup> For an introduction to the Swiss *Heimatfilm* see M. Schaub, M. Schlappner, *Cinéma Suisse. Regards critiques 1896-1987*, Zurich: Centre Suisse du Cinéma, 1987 and F. Aepli, W. Wider, *Der Schweizer Film 1929-1964: Die Schweiz als Ritual* (2 vol.), Zurich: Limmat, 1981. For a more recent discussion of the *Heimatfilm* and, in general, of Swiss film history see V. Hediger, J. Sahli, A. Schneider, eds., *Home Stories: neue Studien zu Film und Kino in der Schweiz: nouvelles approches du cinéma et du film en Suisse*, Marburg: Schüren, 2001.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Von Moltke, *No Place Like Home. Locations of Heimat in German Cinema*, Berkley: University

*Heimat* is an idea shared by German speaking people that is quite difficult to define and even more difficult to translate into another language<sup>3</sup>. It is, however, evident that the multi-faceted and historically shifting meaning of the term always refers to “the relation between human being and place”<sup>4</sup>. It can be defined as the place (house, region or homeland) where somebody was born or grew up and which they feel emotionally connected to<sup>5</sup>. Being linked to a specific place and to memory, it has both a spatial and a temporal connotation.

New Swiss Cinema marked the beginning of a modern, critical, urban national cinematography in the 1960s. After this point, the concept of *Heimat*, instead of being dismissed, was strongly criticised. In analysing this phenomenon, scholars focused their attention on the so-called *Anti-Heimatfilm*.

In my article, I will firstly take into account two examples of *Heimatfilm* and of *Anti-Heimatfilm*, in which foreign characters appear. After that, I will consider some Swiss films related to the Italian diaspora in the age of ‘fordist labour migration’<sup>6</sup>, in particular between the beginning of the Sixties and the beginning of the Eighties, and I will explore how these films deconstructed the idyllic representation of *Heimat*, as a synecdoche for Swissness, through the depiction of claustrophobic, precarious or even uncanny domestic spheres<sup>7</sup>. I will consider three different kinds of film, which are representative of three different critical views of *Heimat*: those by Alvaro Bizzarri, a working-class Italian migrant director, two films by Alexander Seiler and Henry Brandt, pioneers of New Swiss Cinema and, at the end, a feminist documentary directed by Gertrude Pinkus.

The need for such an analysis derives from the fact that cinema about migration has not been considered enough in the broader context of Swiss film history. I argue that this kind of cinema has been in part marginalised by critics and film historians and often considered only as a reflection of social, economic or ethnic tensions in Swiss society<sup>8</sup>. In contrast, cinema about migrants from the Sixties onwards has entered into a subtle conflict with traditional cinema or *Heimatfilm* but its critics proved to be more effective and stronger than the *Anti-Heimatfilm* itself. This study does not presume to be

of California Press, 2005, 1-18. See also A. Ludewig, “Home Meets Heimat”, *M/C Journal* 10, 4 (2007). LINK: <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0708/12-ludewig.php>> (Accessed 22/03/2017).

<sup>3</sup> See P. Blicke, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, Rochester: Camden House, 2004, 1-6.

<sup>4</sup> R. Petri, “Deutsche Heimat 1850-1950”, *Comparative: Leipziger Beiträge zur Universalgeschichte und vergleichenden Gesellschaftsforschung*, 11, 1 (2002): 77-127.

<sup>5</sup> In Duden, the German online dictionary, *Heimat* is defined as a “country, a region or a place where somebody feels at home because he or she was born there, grew up there or has lived there for a long time” and it is often used “as an emotional expression of a close bond with a specific region”. Accessed December 20, 2016: <http://www.duden.de/rechtschreibung/Heimat>.

<sup>6</sup> R. King, “Towards a New Map of European Migration”, in *Selected Studies in International Migration and Immigrant Incorporation*, edited by M. Martinello and J. Rath, Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2010: 111-140, 120. For a bibliography and an introduction to the history of the Italian diaspora in Switzerland see E. Halter, ed., *Gli italiani in Svizzera. Un secolo di emigrazione*. Bellinzona: Casagrande, 2003. For the relationships between Swiss cinema and migration see also B. Spoerri, “Vom Kollektivbild des Fremden zum Eigenen. Die Verwandlung der Migrant/innen im Schweizer Film”, *CH-Studien. Zeitschrift zu Literatur und Kultur der Schweiz*, 1 (2017). LINK: <<http://ch-studien.uni.wroc.pl/4-vom-kollektivbild-des-fremden-zum-eigenen-die-verwandlung-der-migrantinnen-im-schweizer-film/>> (Accessed 22/03/2017).

<sup>7</sup> For the representation of home in cinema see E. Andrews, S. Hockenhull, F. Pheasant-Kelly, eds., *Spaces of the Cinematic Home: Behind the Screen Door*, New York-London: Routledge, 2016 and D. Avery, *Unhomely Cinema: Home and Place in Global Cinema*, London-New York-Delhi: Anthem Press, 2014.

<sup>8</sup> One of the few exceptions is M. Porret, “Entre esthétisme et militantisme: la figure du saisonnier dans le ‘nouveau’ cinéma suisse”, *Décadrages*, 14, 2009: 28-38.

exhaustive but it wants to be a first step into a new consideration of diasporic cinema in the realm of Swiss film history. In this essay, I will deal with concepts from cultural and social studies, such as home and diaspora, with a medium-specific approach, focused both on content and stylistic film analysis.

## 2. HEIMATFILM

A game warden with a rifle and a very old man are high in the mountains. They are sitting on some rocks and discussing the future of their region. Somebody is poaching in this area and the old man is angry about this and expressing his worries concerning the arrival of many foreign people in the region, who have come for the construction of the railway tunnel. In his opinion, they are damaging the serenity of the valley.

We are on the Gotthard Massif during the creation of the longest railway tunnel built in the nineteenth century. It is one of the first scenes of the film *Der letzte Postillon vom Gotthard* (*The Last Postilion of the Gotthard*, Edmund Heuberger, 1941), which celebrates both the construction of the Gotthard tunnel and the beauty of the Gotthard region, which is considered the focal point of the Swiss Confederation<sup>9</sup>.

*Der letzte Postillon vom Gotthard* is an example of a *Heimatfilm*, a genre that, in Switzerland, is closely related to the *Bergfilm*, the mountain film<sup>10</sup>. Both *Heimatfilme* and *Bergfilme* are set in rural or, more often, in alpine contexts and are characterised by moralistic, sentimental, simplistic plots and by a picturesque or even kitsch visual style. The Swiss *Heimatfilm* shares these characteristics with the German *Heimatfilm*, but it is related to the ideology of the so-called *Geistige Landesverteidigung*<sup>11</sup>.

*Der letzte Postillon vom Gotthard* brings forth the conflict between the traditional economy, based on the transport with horses and carriages through the pass, and the imminent opening of the railway, which will make the transport with animals obsolete. The film celebrates the last carriage drivers who traveled through the Gotthard, symbols of the preindustrial age of the pass, but, at the same time, it recognizes the importance of the construction of the tunnel for the Confederation and for the reinforcement of the Gotthard as centre, axis and core of the country. In this sense, this film is emblematic of

<sup>9</sup> For the representation of Gotthard in Swiss culture see B. Previšić, ed., *Gotthardfantasien. Eine Blütenlese aus Wissenschaft und Literatur*, Baden: Hier und Jetzt, 2016.

<sup>10</sup> For the Swiss *Bergfilm* see Y. Zimmermann, "Die Berge aus Schweizer Sicht—ein Streifzug durch den Schweizer Film", in *Bollywood: Das indische Kino und die Schweiz*, edited by A. Schneider, Zürich: Museum für Gestaltung, 2002: 124-133 and D. Schnetzer, *Bergbild und geistige Landesverteidigung: Die visuelle Inszenierung der Alpen im massenmedialen Ensemble der modernen Schweiz*, Marburg: Schüren, 2001.

<sup>11</sup> The spiritual national defence was a popular political-cultural attitude in Switzerland between the Thirties and the Sixties. Its aim was to strengthen values perceived as typically Swiss and also the creation of a cultural defence against totalitarian ideologies. It is interesting what Marcy Goldberg wrote concerning the ideological differences between Swiss and German *Heimatfilm*: "Although it is all about the same mountain landscape, the symbolism is dissimilar. As opposed to the proto-fascist German films, which affirmed the superiority of the mountain context and mountaineers with respect to the life in the valleys, Swiss films considered the Alps as symbol for the «authentic» Switzerland and its democratic values / Obwohl es um die gleichen Gebirgslandschaften ging, war die Symbolik eine andere. Anders als die protofaschistischen deutschen Filme, die die Überlegenheit von Bergwelt und Bergsteigern gegenüber dem Leben im Tal behaupteten, nahmen diese Filme die Alpen als Symbol für die 'wehrhafte' Schweiz und ihre demokratischen Werte" in M. Goldberg, "Steine des Anstosses. Über die Beziehung des Schweizer Films zu seinen Bergen", *Filmbulletin*, 6, 2015: 7-16. The author refers to Siegfried Kracauer and Susan Sontag's ideological analysis of German *Heimatfilm* before the Second World War.

the relationship between the *Heimatfilm* and the category of modernity: a relationship of negotiation rather than of opposition<sup>12</sup>.

Heuberger highlights the alpine landscape, emphasising the sublimity of nature. This glorification is in line with the ideology of the Swiss *Heimatfilm*, in which patriotic cultural values are projected onto idyllic natural landscapes, which become the materialisation of the concept of *Heimat* itself<sup>13</sup>. The *Heimat* of the *Heimatfilm* is always a natural landscape, an open space, a mystical environment.

Modernity is a threat both to the traditional economy of the region and to the landscape but the biggest menace to the 'stability of home', the real peril for the *Heimat*, the threat to its purity and innocence, seems to be foreigners. If the Italian engineer Caminada, Louis Favre's assistant and one of the main characters, is symbolically assimilated into the *Heimat* through his wedding to Alois Zraggen's daughter<sup>14</sup>, the workers involved in the construction of the tunnel will not be able to find a place in the *Heimat*.

The formless mass of workers, mainly immigrants from the North of Italy, who are involved in the construction of the tunnel, are at the edge of the representation. Their tragic stories of exploitation and their strikes to get better conditions are not mentioned and their accidents at work are only alluded to in one toned-down scene in order to depict Favre's benevolence towards them<sup>15</sup>. They cannot be assimilated into the reality of the *Heimat* and for them, shut in the bowels of the earth, every possibility of connection with the natural landscape is excluded. Foreigners must stay outside the *Heimat* in order to keep its presumed innocence safe.

### 3. ANTI-HEIMATFILM

In *Les petites fugues* (*The Little Escapes*, Yves Yersin, 1979), the old farm worker Pipe is going to retire after forty years of activity but he cannot imagine a life without his work. He keeps on doing his job on a farm in the French part of Switzerland and, thanks to the additional income, he can buy a moped. His colleague Luigi, an Italian seasonal worker, helps him to learn to drive the moped. Pipe starts to explore the world around his village, escaping the tensions of the farm, which are due to the bossy and narrow-minded bailiff. An excursion under the influence of alcohol costs him his driver's license. After that, he begins to experiment with his new camera: he becomes a photographer.

Pipe loves photographing himself and he loves to take pictures of himself next to a picture with the Matterhorn on it, a mountain which has taken on a mythical quality for mountaineers and is also an important national symbol, today reduced to a mere pop icon of Swissness<sup>16</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> For the relationships between *Heimatfilm* and modernity see Von Moltke, *No Place Like Home*, 1-18.

<sup>13</sup> Goldberg 2014, pp. 73-75; Id., "Geography of a Swiss Body; P. Liechti, "Hans im Glück", in *The Autobiographical Turn in Germanophone Documentary and Experimental Film*, edited by R. Curtis and A. Fenner, Rochester: Camden House, 2014: 73-75. For a deeper analysis of this aspect see M. Lento, "Im Bauch des Bergs – Der Gotthardtunnel im Film", *Cinema Jahrbuch*, 62, 2017: 120-133.

<sup>14</sup> Louis Favre (1826-1879) was the Swiss engineer who was responsible for the construction of the tunnel. Alois Zraggen (1822-1888) was the legendary last coachman of the Gotthard.

<sup>15</sup> Villi Hermann's *San Gottardo* (1977) takes into account the tragic stories of the Italian workers.

<sup>16</sup> M. Goldberg, "Suspekte Schönheit. Über die Darstellung der Berge im neueren Schweizer Film", *Cinema Jahrbuch*, 53 (2008): 38-49 (41-42).



Figura 1 - The farm worker Pipe (Michel Robin) in front of his camera and next to the picture of the Matterhorn

The Matterhorn is Pipe's childish utopia, his link to the *Heimat* (in the sense of homeland), based on a naïve and narcissistic projection<sup>17</sup>. When Pipe matures, thanks to his *petites fugues*, that is his expeditions on his moped and his experiments with the camera, the Matterhorn becomes a concrete destination. And so he decides to rent a helicopter in order to reach the mountain, but once he arrives on the top, he realises with dismay that there is nothing but rocks and ice there. A symbol of freedom, independence and tradition is reduced to simple physical materials.

*Les petites fugues* is one of the best examples of an *Anti-Heimatfilm*, a tendency more than a genre of the so-called New Swiss Cinema, which emerged in the mid-Sixties. The *Anti-Heimatfilm* is set in the same contexts and makes use of the same symbols as the *Heimatfilm*. It offers, however, a fresh look at them. In *Les petites fugues*, apart from the demythologising of the Matterhorn, the countryside is reconsidered: it is not an idyll in contrast with the disorder of the urban context anymore, but a place of oppression and existential narrowness.

In a study devoted to the representation of farmers in the New Swiss documentary from the end of the Sixties until the end of the millennium, Vinzenz Hediger analysed the ideological reasons behind the massive presence of farmers. According to Hediger, in order to build an "imagined community"<sup>18</sup> in a multi-linguistic and multi-cultural

<sup>17</sup> For the relationships between landscape and narcissism in the Swiss context see M. Tortajada, "Cinéma suisse: comment échapper au paysage narcissique?", in *Derrière les images*, edited by O. Gonseth, J. Hainard, R. Kaehr, Neuchâtel: Musée d'Ethnographie, 2000: 279-306.

<sup>18</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London-New York: Verso, 1983.



context such as that of Switzerland, it was necessary to use different myths from those used by the country's linguistic and cultural whole. The myth of the farmer and that of the *homo alpinus*, which sometimes occur together, are two of these myths. In spite of the different ideological approaches between *Heimatfilm* and *Anti-Heimatfilm*, it is also true that

There is something ephemeral about the gesture of protectively recording ways of life which are passed down from generation to generation. Complaints about the impending loss of the rural ideal, from those who are skeptical of modernity, repeat and reinforce the idealization which one would actually like to behave critically towards<sup>19</sup>.

Referring to traditional ways of life, despite the fresh look at them, causes nostalgia and paradoxically strengthens the process of idealisation which one wants to reject. The images of open spaces, the countryside and the mountains are deconstructed but they are always at the core of the representation. They are not innocent and reassuring anymore, but these values seem to be nostalgically yearned after. The presence of the Italian seasonal worker, a character full of humanity in a context as difficult as that of the farm, led by a bigot bailiff, could be considered part of the latent nostalgic mood. The foreigner, who comes from an agricultural and underdeveloped South, makes the spectator catch a glimpse of the lost value of solidarity.

Despite these remarks, it is undeniable that *Les petits fugues* remains an effective film and the *Anti-Heimatfilm* is one of the most interesting tendencies of Swiss cinema. However, it is clear that its criticism of the concept of *Heimat* should be reconsidered by scholars and recognized as diminished.

#### 4. CHILDREN AND BARRACKS

Alvaro Bizzarri is an unusual personality in Swiss cinema<sup>20</sup>. He came to make films without any professional training and he dealt with the issue of Italian migration from the point of view of the migrant himself. His cinema can be considered one of the strongest criticisms of the concept of *Heimat* and, implicitly, of the *Heimatfilm*. He migrated to Switzerland from Tuscany in 1955 and at first worked as a welder. He soon became a member of the local Colonia Libera Italiana, an antifascist Italian association in Switzerland, and he led its film club.

In 1970, Bizzarri left his job as a welder and became a clerk in a photo shop, where he learnt to use a super 8 camera. After a few months, he borrowed a camera from the shop and he began to shoot two super 8 films: *Il treno del Sud* (*The Train from the South*, 1970) and *Lo stagionale* (*The Seasonal Worker*, 1971). Alvaro Bizzarri developed a narrative and visual style strongly influenced by Italian Neorealism. *Il cammino della*

<sup>19</sup> V. Hediger, "Bauer, nach getaner Arbeit die Zeitung lesend: Zur politischen Ikonografie des bürgerlichen Lebens in neueren Schweizer Dokumentarfilmen" in *Home Stories: Neue Studien zu Film und Kino in der Schweiz/Nouvelles approches du cinéma et du film en suisse*, edited by V. Hediger, J. Sahli, A. Schneider, M. Tröhler, Marburg: Schüren, 2001: 150-151. Original text: "Gerade aber der Gestus des bewahrenden Registrierens tradierter Lebensformen hat etwas Verhängliches. Im modernitätsskeptischen Klagen über den drohenden Verlust des bürgerlichen Ideals wiederholt und bekräftigt sich die Idealisierung, zu der man sich eigentlich kritisch verhalten möchte".

<sup>20</sup> For an introduction to Alvaro Bizzarri see M. La Barba, "Alvaro Bizzarri et la naissance d'un cinéaste migrant: scénario d'une rencontre", in *La migration italienne dans la suisse*, edited by M. La Barba et alii, Lausanne: Antipodes, 2013, 243-290.

*speranza* (*Journey of Hopes*, 1950), a film about a group of Sicilian labour migrants, impressed the young worker and pushed him to consider the possibility of describing the migrant experience with the cinematic medium<sup>21</sup>.

Alvaro Bizzarri started to make films at a dramatic moment for migrants in Switzerland. At the end of the Sixties, James Schwarzenbach launched his first initiative (*Überfremdungsinitiative*) against the excessive number of foreigners and this was put to the vote in June 1970. The initiative was rejected but 45% of the voters supported Schwarzenbach's proposal of limiting the number of foreign workers moving to Switzerland to 10% of the entire population, with the consequent deportation of hundreds of thousands of foreigners. Alvaro Bizzarri as a member of a *colonia libera* was against this climate of xenophobia and also extremely critical of the tough conditions for guest workers, mainly from Italy, who were subjected to the *Saisonnierstatut*, legislation passed in 1931 with the aim of guaranteeing a labour demand-oriented migration policy and of combating the possibility of there being too many foreigners. This was executed by limiting permanent or long-term stays for migrants and their right to be reunited with their families<sup>22</sup>.

In *Lo stagionale*, Bizzarri's masterwork, he depicts the story of the seasonal worker Giuseppe, who becomes a widower and is forced to bring his son Stefano to Switzerland. The authorities do not allow his son to stay because of the law, which prevents seasonal workers from reuniting with their families and, for this reason, the child is forced to live illegally in his father's home without leaving the apartment. This film denounces the conditions of many migrant children in Switzerland, who lived hidden and without any education or health insurance<sup>23</sup>.

Alvaro Bizzarri could be described as an 'accented' director *ante litteram*<sup>24</sup>. In *An Accented Cinema*, Hamid Naficy analyses the filmmaking of displaced and exiled individuals, focusing on how their personal experiences translate into identifiable film aesthetics. In particular, Naficy emphasises the representation of space in accented cinema. He talks about the "chronotopic inscription of utopia and dystopia"<sup>25</sup> and he detects what he labels 'open' and 'closed' cinematic forms in accented cinema. The open forms privilege external locations, open settings, landscapes, natural and bright lighting, itinerant characters, long shots and mobile framing, while the closed form consists of

interior locations and closed settings [...] a dark lighting scheme that creates a mood of constriction and claustrophobia, and characters who are restricted in their movement and perspective by spatial, bodily, or other barriers<sup>26</sup>.

Domestic spaces in exile are presented as claustrophobic or uncanny, as in *Lo stagionale*. In this film we see the young character inhabiting his house as if it were a prison and

<sup>21</sup> See M. La Barba, "Alvaro Bizzarri: migration, militance, cinéma", *Décadrages*, 14 (2009): 79-89 (85).

<sup>22</sup> For these topics see A. Maiolino, *Als die Italiener noch Tschinggen waren. Der Widerstand gegen die Schwarzenbach-Initiative*. Zurich: Rotpunktverlag, 2011.

<sup>23</sup> This is now a well-known historical fact in Switzerland, but it was a taboo for many victims for years, until the psychotherapist Marina Frigerio published her book *Bambini Proibiti* (2012), which collects the testimonies of many people, now adults, who were forced to live hidden during their childhood. Another film which tells this story is *Pane e cioccolata* (*Bread and Chocolate*, Franco Brusati, 1973).

<sup>24</sup> H. Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. For a discussion of the relationships between home, diaspora and cinema see also Id., ed., *Home, Homeland, Exile*, London-New York: Routledge, 1999.

<sup>25</sup> Naficy *An Accented Cinema*, 153.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*



the director stresses this feeling with his stylistic and narrative choices. Even when the father and the son seem to make the house feel like a home, something occurs to upset this, such as bad news on the radio or in a letter, or nostalgia for the mother. The domestic sphere is transformed into an unwelcoming and constantly disrupted environment.



Figures 2a, b - Stefano (Roberto Frisulli), the son of the seasonal worker Giuseppe (Rolando Mion), waiting for his father

During the film, Stefano is confronted with some Swiss children. In one of the first scenes, we see the child at home waiting for his father at the window and looking at children playing together outside. In another scene, in one of the rare moments in which the child is outside and it seems that the father can change their situation slightly, we see

both characters strolling in a meadow. Some music accompanies this walk and seems to emphasize the serenity of the moment and, moreover, Bizzarri chooses open forms of filmmaking to represent this scene. The father explains to his son his optimistic plans for the future concerning the possibility of attending school and learning German. All of a sudden, they come across a group of children and Stefano approaches the group. He cannot understand their language and asks his father to take him home. The young migrant is denied open spaces, freedom and entertainment: the image of Heidi, both a Swiss icon of idealised childhood and a subject favoured by the *Heimatfilm*, becomes that of this hidden child, who seems exactly the opposite.

Thanks to the success of *Lo stagionale*, Alvaro Bizzarri was able to buy a 16mm camera and shoot *Il rovescio della medaglia* (*The other side of the coin*, 1974), a documentary film. This work opens with some pictures of the city of Bienne and its natural surroundings, which seem like kitsch and stereotyped postcards. A voice-over reads some passages from a tourism brochure: Bienne is characterised by a flourishing watch manufacturing industry, a futuristic urban structure and a beautiful landscape. At the beginning of the film, a vista shot of the city and its parks is partly covered by a Swiss flag in close up.



Figure 3 - The Swiss flag at the beginning of *Il rovescio della medaglia*

At the edge of this paradise, however, there are many barracks where hundreds of foreign seasonal workers, mostly Italian, live in very miserable conditions and with dramatically restricted rights. The barracks were dark, small and uncomfortable and the seasonal workers had no right to be reunited with their families, no possibility of

striking, limited professional mobility and extremely reduced social benefits<sup>27</sup>. Bizzarri interviews some people who live in the city, but nobody seems to be aware of the existence of these barracks. This is the other side of the coin of Bienne, evoked by the film's title: the unknown and invisible part of the city. Bizzarri's camera crosses unexplored thresholds and shows the unpleasantness of the migrants' huts. The pictures taken in the huts completely change their nature with respect to the beginning of the film: they become gloomier, less clean and reveal humans at the margins of society who lack hope. Their alienation is visible on their faces.



Figura 4 - A seasonal worker inside a barrack in *Il rovescio della medaglia*

The voice-over informs the spectator about the exploitation which dominates the temporary stays of the seasonal workers. According to Bizzarri, these conditions infringe the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>28</sup>. The typical idyllic, idealised, touristy pictures of Switzerland become these brutal pictures of seasonal workers living in the barracks. As in *Lo stagionale*, Bizzarri plays slightly with myths, images and aesthetics linked

<sup>27</sup> A famous enquiry into the working, living and social conditions of Italian workers in Switzerland was published in D. Castelnuovo Frigessi, *Elvezia, il tuo governo: operai italiani emigrati in Svizzera*, Rome: Einaudi, 1977.

<sup>28</sup> For the conditions for seasonal workers in Switzerland see also S. Arlettaz, "Stagionali" in *Historisches Lexikon der Schweiz*, Bern: HLS. Accessed December 20, 2016: <http://www.hls-dhs-dss.ch/textes/d/D25738.php>. For this topic see also J.M. Niederberger, "La politica di integrazione della Svizzera dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale", in *Gli italiani in Svizzera. Un secolo di emigrazione*, Bellinzona: Casagrande 2004, 93-108.

to the traditional idea of ‘Swissness’, which is not far from the concept of *Heimat*, and deconstructs them. Bizzarri’s cinema shows what cannot be included in the sphere of *Heimat*, the contradictions which are part of this term and its discriminatory, unfair character. There is no nostalgia for a lost paradise, like in the *Anti-Heimatfilm*, there is only the will to denounce the impossibility of home for migrants in Switzerland.

## 5. HOME AND THE (URBAN) NEW SWISS CINEMA

The image of the barracks is a recurring visual motif in Alvaro Bizzarri’s cinema. It appears in other films such as *Il treno del sud* and *Touchol* and it is both evidence of the material conditions of migrants in Switzerland and a visual metaphor. When Bizzarri begins his work as a film director, the issues of migration and housing are still a part of the Swiss media landscape<sup>29</sup>.

In the traditional historiography, New Swiss Cinema began in 1964 with the release of three films which dealt with the social and political concerns of contemporary society, in particular migration and work. The first film in this trio is *Les Apprentis* (*The Apprentices*, Alain Tanner, CH, 1964), a documentary about the life of some young industrial workers in the French part of Switzerland.

In the second film, *Siamo italiani*, the theme is Italian migration to Switzerland<sup>30</sup>. This work is, on a stylistic level, quite refined: an influence from the *cinéma vérité*, references to Cassavetes’ and *Nouvelle Vague* films and even some formal characteristics taken from the cinema of the early film avant-gardes are noticeable<sup>31</sup>.

This documentary aims to show the daily life of Italian migrants in Switzerland to Swiss citizens, who did not have any contact with Italian migrants outside the workplace. It aims to reveal the existential aspect of people, their living conditions and their leisure activities. In relation to this film, Max Frisch wrote the famous sentence which appears in every text devoted to Italian migration to Switzerland: “Man hat Arbeitskräfte gerufen, und es kommen Menschen”. This could be translated as “We asked for workers, but people arrived”<sup>32</sup>.

*Siamo italiani* is not a militant film like *Lo stagionale* or other Bizzarri films. Marthe Porret stressed its “traitement esthétisant» of guest workers, their anonymity and a point of view which is nearly ‘exotisante’”<sup>33</sup>. In Bizzarri’s works, both in his documentaries and his feature films, there is a closer proximity between the director and the migrants. Italian migrants themselves are clearly the primary target audience of Bizzarri’s films, while *Siamo italiani* seems to be addressed above all to a Swiss audience, which does not know anything about the life of Italian guest workers in Switzerland<sup>34</sup>.

However, the film is not apolitical and transforms the cinematic medium into an

<sup>29</sup> The film *Statut Saisonnier* (*Seasonal Workers*, Alex Mayenfisch, 2013) uses pictures from 1960 to 1990 from the Swiss-French television archive. There is also a lot of photographic evidence of life in the barracks. Some representative pictures are published in Halter, ed., *Gli italiani in Svizzera*.

<sup>30</sup> For an analysis of this film see S. Rudolph, “‘C’era una volta in Svizzera’ – ‘The Italians’ in Swiss Cinema”, in *The Cinemas of Italian Migration. European and Transatlantic Narratives*, edited by S. Schrader and D. Winkler, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013: 123-140.

<sup>31</sup> Porret, “Entre esthétique et militantisme”, 28-38 (30-33).

<sup>32</sup> M. Frisch, Introduction to *Siamo italiani: Gespräche mit italienischen Arbeitern in der Schweiz*, edited by A. Seiler, Zurich: EVZ-Verlag, 1965, 7. For a discussion of this sentence in relation to the film see S. Rudolph, “‘C’era una volta in Svizzera”, 123-140 (126-132).

<sup>33</sup> Porret, “Entre esthétique et militantisme”, 28-38 (30-33).

<sup>34</sup> Both Bizzarri’s films and *Siamo italiani* were, however, part of the film catalogue *I cineclub degli emi-*

instrument for the analysis of society, distancing itself in this sense from the disengagement of traditional cinema. As the director Alexander J. Seiler wrote, the first step New Swiss Cinema took was that of “learning to know and see an alienated homeland as reality”<sup>35</sup>. According to Seiler, it was important for the directors of this kind of cinema to have a critical spirit and deal with contemporary society, raising awkward questions about that society<sup>36</sup>.

It was with the same approach that Henri Brandt made *La Suisse s'interroge* (Swiss Enquiry, CH 1964), the third inaugural work of New Swiss Cinema, which was screened at the national industrial exhibition in Lausanne. With *La Suisse s'interroge*, composed of five short films, Brandt proposed a ‘langage cinématographique pensé en fonction de l'espace d'exposition’, playing with ‘la couleur, la musique, les formats des pellicules, le nombre d'écrans’<sup>37</sup>.

The first part, entitled “La Suisse est belle”, was shot with coloured Cinemascope and offers a stereotypical image of Switzerland similar to the one at the beginning of Bizzarri's film. At the end of this part, Brandt addresses a question to the viewer, asking if it is true that everything in Switzerland works perfectly. In the second part, entitled “Problèmes”, an ordinary black and white screen creates a stark contrast with the first one. The issue dealt with in this part is migration. Brandt shows different newspaper clippings of adverts for empty apartments which will only be rented out to Swiss citizens.

These three films mark the beginning of a modern, critical and urban national cinematography in the 1960s, which is a reaction to traditional cinema and its aesthetics, ideologies and themes<sup>38</sup>. On the one hand New Swiss Cinema, as I discussed above, becomes an urban cinema in the following years. On the other hand, it deals with the countryside and the mountain again, as in *Anti-Heimatfilm*.

At this point, the theme of the migrant, defined in different ways, entered the cinematic imaginary. Martin Schaub wrote that in 1964 the migrant became the reflection of the condition of Swiss filmmakers, “étrangers dans leur pays, ignoré par les masses, traités par l'Etat comme une quantité négligeable, n'ayant au fond pas voix au chapitre”<sup>39</sup>.

The philosophical and political problem of hospitality, described by Derrida as the experience of losing the sense of feeling at home due to the destabilising entrance of Otherness into a coherent home space, became a crucial topic for Swiss filmmakers<sup>40</sup>. According to Derrida, the arrival of a guest could signify a positive liberation of the

*grati in Svizzera*, edited by the Cineteca Alfredo Politzer delle Colonie Libere Italiane e della Commissione Culturale Federazione delle Colonie Libere.

<sup>35</sup> A. J. Seiler, “Fremde im einigen Land”, in *Film in der Schweiz*, edited by P. W. Jansen, W. Schütte, Munich-Wien: Hansen, 1978: 23. Original text: “eine entfremdete Heimat als Wirklichkeit kennen und sehen <zu> lernen”.

<sup>36</sup> Seiler, “Fremde im einigen Land”, 23.

<sup>37</sup> See “Les films d'Henry Brandt. La suisse s'interroge ou comment 5 films de 3 minutes ont ébranlé les certitudes helvétiques”. LINK: <http://www.lausanne.ch/thematiques/culture-et-patrimoine/histoire-et-patrimoine/archives-communales/expositions-virtuelles/expo-64/attractions-principales/les-films-d-henry-brandt.html> (Accessed 16/03/2017). On this film see also A. Walther, *La suisse s'interroge ou l'exercice de l'audace*, Lausanne: Antipodes, 2016.

<sup>38</sup> See M. Tortajada, “Le regard urbain dans le cinéma suisse des années 70”, in *Un nouvel art de voir la ville et de faire du cinéma. Du cinéma et des restes urbains* (Michel Soutter, Fredi Murer, Alain Tanner), edited by C. Perraton and F. Jost, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003, 187-202.

<sup>39</sup> M. Schaub, “Étranger mon miroir” in *Cinéma Suisse. Regards critiques 1896-1987*, edited by M. Schaub, M. Schlappner, Zurich: Centre Suisse du Cinéma, 1987: 119-125. Original text: “étrangers dans leur pays, ignoré par les masses, traités par l'Etat comme une quantité négligeable, n'ayant au fond pas voix au chapitre”.

<sup>40</sup> See J. Derrida, *Of Hospitality*, translated by R. Bolwby, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000. Derrida speaks about an unconditional and abstract hospitality.



host from the narrowness of his subjectivity<sup>41</sup>. A liberation which is often experienced with extreme fear. In some scenes in *Siamo italiani*, and later, for example, in Peter Ammann's *Braccia sì o uomini no* (*Arms Yes, Men No*, Peter Ammann, 1973), the film-makers document some Swiss citizens' refusal to be hospitable. Their perception of the disruption of their coherent home space – of the *Heimat* – caused by Italian migrants, results in xenophobia.

These fears led to the above-mentioned *Schwarzenbach Initiativen*, which could have led to the expulsion of hundreds of thousands of people<sup>42</sup>. As the contemporary documentary film *Les années Schwarzenbach* shows, despite the proposals being rejected many Italian, Spanish and Portuguese migrants decided to go back to their country. They tried to find a home elsewhere.

## 6. HOME AND GENDER

In the district where I live, there are also many foreigners. If I see women shopping, I am struck by their joviality. We exchange small talk, but then they retire behind their curtains and I do the same behind mine. One day a neighbour from the South of Italy asked me to find an orphanage for his children because his wife was hospitalised in a psychiatric clinic. Her continuous depression had led her to take pills and drink alcohol. The health consequences were very serious. I was completely stunned, with a heavy heart. I had met this woman without actually knowing her. Our curtains had divided us more than all borders do. For this reason, I decided to take my camera and my tape recorder and go around the city to peer behind the curtains of these women<sup>43</sup>.

It is with this voice-over that *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio* (*The value of woman lies in her silence*, 1981) begins. It is one of the few films about Italian migration which deals exclusively with gender problems. The voice-over is that of Gertrude Pinkus, a Swiss director who worked in Germany<sup>44</sup>. This beginning is a declaration of a film poetic. The desire for a relationship and to cross intercultural and intersubjective barriers is the prime motivation to make this film which becomes a feminist act.

The protagonist – from Basilicata, emigrated to Frankfurt, the mother of four children, a housewife and then a factory worker – does not allow Pinkus to film her and wants to remain anonymous. The risk is too high for her. Gertrude Pinkus can only record her deluge of words with a tape recorder. She stages her life story, as in docufiction.

The director enters this woman's domestic sphere. Her intimacy with the woman allows her to cross a threshold and discover a space which most of the time remains invisible, and she documents the confinement and the suffering of a migrant housewife. This is a woman who is completely alienated from her new social context: Frankfurt is a difficult city and the German language is an insurmountable obstacle for her.

Maria Magnone (not her real name) was born in a small mountain village in Lucania. She is deeply nostalgic for her *Heimat*, for her relationship with her mother and

<sup>41</sup> For a discussion of hospitality in Derrida see A. Sheperd, *The Gift of the Other: Lévinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality*, Milton, Pickwick, 2014.

<sup>42</sup> For the relationship between Schwarzenbach referendums and Swiss cinema see M. Lento, "Les années Schwarzenbach – italienische Migranten im Schweizer Film", *Cinema*, 57 (2012): 146-158.

<sup>43</sup> Gertrude Pinkus' original voice-over is in Italian.

<sup>44</sup> For an introduction to Gertrude Pinkus see B. Blöchliger, ed., *Cut: Film- und Videomacherinnen in der Schweiz von den Anfängen bis 1994: Eine Bestandsaufnahme*, Frankfurt am Main-Basel: Stroemfeld, 1995.



for the other women in the village<sup>45</sup>. Gertrude Pinkus deals with the bond between the protagonist and her origins and shoots some scenes in Basilicata. At the same time, she does not idealise a context where the patriarchal rules of honour are in force. The impossibility of home is twofold for Maria: she is stuck between an extremely conservative country and alienation in Frankfurt.

Gertrude Pinkus deconstructs both the romantic idea of an innocent *Heimat*, which is not located in Switzerland anymore but rather in the agricultural South of Italy, and also the image of domesticity and familial life. She shows how both spheres are profoundly gendered and discriminatory and how power relations are dominated by men. She aligns herself with a feminist tradition which contested the traditional representation of home, which was made by men<sup>46</sup>. This is a tradition that can be traced back, at least, to Bourdieu's famous article on the Berber house, where the sociologist described its ostensible gendering of the internal spaces, reflecting the difference in status between men and women in Berber society<sup>47</sup>.



Figura 5 - Maria Magnone (Maria Tucci-La Gamba) in *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio*. (Courtesy of Gertrude Pinkus. Picture from Cinémathèque suisse)

In reality, the possibility of home exists but it is not observable in the places where

<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to find direct relationships between the concept of *Heimat* and Italian culture. There may be a similarity to the cultural movement known as *strapaese*, which was founded in order to defend rural traditions in culture in 1926. For this topic see E. Koenraads, "Sergio Maldini and the North-East of Italy", in *European Studies. A Journal of European Culture, History and Politics*, 18 (2002): 182-193. For the relationships between gender issues and Italian migration to Germany see Y. Rieker, "Ein Stück Heimat findet man ja immer": *Die italienische Einwanderung in die Bundesrepublik*, Essen: Klartext Verlag 2003. For the relationships between gender and Italian emigration see also L. Baldassar, D. Gabaccia (eds.), *Intimacy and Italian Migration: Gender and Domestic Lives in a Mobile World*, New York, Fordham University Press, 2011.

<sup>46</sup> For the relationships between gender and home see D. Morley, *Home Territories. Media, Mobility and Identity*, London-New York: Routledge, 2000, 56-85.

<sup>47</sup> P. Bourdieu, "The Berber House or the World Reversed", *Social Science Information*, 9 (1970): 151-170.

it is usually considered to be. It is, in fact, in the relationship with other women. For Gertrude Pinkus, it is essential, following Luce Irigaray, 'to be two'<sup>48</sup>. The value of a woman does not lie in silence, submission or resignation anymore. The film itself was born because of Pinkus' desire for intersubjective relationships. 'To be two', in the case of *Il valore della donna è il suo silenzio*, is not only Pinkus' desire but also reflects her professional practice: archive documents in the Cinémathèque Suisse testify to the close collaboration between Pinkus and Anna Monferdin, who worked on the subject of the film. This was the cooperation which allowed Anna Monferdin, a 'skilled' migrant from the North, to really understand the female condition in Southern Italy<sup>49</sup>.

The protagonist seems to find a home in her space of communication with Pinkus, and Pinkus finds a home in her communication with the protagonist. In general, the importance of relationships with other women is stressed in the film: the bond with other women in Basilicata is considered an instrument of silent resistance, as is the friendship with a Turkish woman in a factory in Frankfurt, where Maria finds a job after several years. If there is a place of safety, of equality, where it is possible to exercise individual autonomy, this is not the domestic sphere nor the traditional community, not home nor *Heimat*. In reality it is the space of communication between women, free from the constraints of power.

## 7. CONCLUSION

In this contribution, I have suggested a new way to consider the dialectic between *Heimatfilm*, *Anti-Heimatfilm* and films about Italian migration in Swiss cinema. If the *Heimatfilm* glorifies values linked to the idea of Swissness, the *Anti-Heimatfilm* deconstructs these values through iconoclastic strategies and a visual aesthetic far from the postcard-like or kitsch style of the *Heimatfilm*. The *Anti-Heimatfilm* can be considered a form of cinema criticism of the traditional concept of *Heimat*, but its criticism also targets some aspects of modernity. It seems to include the characteristic of nostalgia for a lost world. Its iconoclastic attitude should be reconsidered by scholars, in particular if we take Urban New Swiss Cinema into account.

With the rise of this cinema from the mid-1960s onwards, the issue of migration became central. Films about Italian migration confront the concept of *Heimat* in different ways, but often through the depiction of claustrophobic or miserable domestic spaces, which are often contrasted with the classic representation of Swissness. The deconstruction of these representations is particularly effective in, for example, Alvaro Bizzarri's diasporic cinema and, in a different way, in Gertrude Pinkus' feminist film. My analysis has also challenged the marginalisation of cinema about migration in the historiography of Swiss cinema and I hope it gives rise to further discussions in the future.

<sup>48</sup> L. Irigaray, *To Be Two*, Hove: Psychology Press, 2001. The French philosopher deals with intersexual relationships in her book but I refer to a new reading by the Italian feminist film studies group FAScinA, which proposes using the term to analyse the supportive relationships between women. For a discussion of the relationships between Luce Irigaray's thought and cinematic theory see C. Bainbridge, *A Feminine Cinematics: Luce Irigaray, Women and Film*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

<sup>49</sup> In the Swiss film archive in Zurich, I found the material related to a project of a film entitled *Sono emigrata*, the work title of Pinkus' film. Anna Monferdin was co-author of the project during the writing process. Gertrude Pinkus confirmed there was a close collaboration which was interrupted because Anna Monferdin had to go back to Italy indefinitely. Anna Monferdin denied Pinkus' account and she stated that her work was interrupted because she had some problems working with Pinkus.